



# US Highway 53 Virginia to Eveleth

**STATE PROJECTS SP 6918-80,  
SP 6918-84, AND SP 6918-86**

**FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT  
STATEMENT/RECORD OF DECISION**

SEPTEMBER 2015

Publication under 42 USC 4332(2)(c) and 49 USC 303



U.S. Department of Transportation

**Federal Highway  
Administration**



US 53  
From 2nd Avenue West in Virginia  
To Bourgin Road  
St. Louis County, Minnesota

Minnesota State Project Number SP 6918-80, SP 6918-84, and SP 6918-86

RECORD OF DECISION

September 2015

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) approves the decision to construct and operate the preferred alternative as identified in the attached Final Environmental Impact Statement (Final EIS) for the US Highway 53 Virginia to Eveleth project. The preferred alternative (Alternative E-2) generally follows existing US 53 from the south end of the Midway area to the MN 135 exit ramp for the start of new four-lane construction. The new alignment then continues on a northeasterly track on the present day Landfill Road corridor before turning to the west to cross over the Rouchleau Pit. The pit is approximately 250 feet deep at the crossing location, and the bridge would span approximately 1,100 feet with 180-foot or taller bridge piers within the pit. Upon crossing the pit, the alignment turns to the southwest following an abandoned railroad corridor that runs between the pit and residential neighborhoods before reconnecting to existing US 53 at 2nd Avenue.

The preferred alternative meets the project purpose of addressing the termination of the 1960 easement agreement between United States Steel Corporation (US Steel, now RGGGS Land and Minerals, Co., or RGGGS) and the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) for an approximately one and a half mile segment of US 53, while continuing to provide a transportation facility that will safely maintain adequate roadway capacity and mobility as well as local, regional, and inter-regional connectivity. FHWA has also identified the preferred alternative as the environmentally preferred alternative. FHWA also finds that all practicable measures to minimize environmental harm have been incorporated into the design of the preferred alternative. Appropriate environmental commitments will be carried out to mitigate impacts.

This decision is based on an evaluation of information presented in the Draft EIS, the attached Final EIS, and all technical reports and supporting documentation incorporated by reference into the Draft EIS and Final EIS. Additional basis for this decision is contained in the remainder of this Record of Decision.

9/10/15  
Date

Arlene Kocher  
Arlene Kocher  
Division Administrator  
Federal Highway Administration



# Record of Decision

## Introduction

Since May 1960, the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) has operated a segment of US Highway 53 (US 53) on an easement granted by United States Steel Corporation (US Steel, now RGGGS Land and Minerals Co., or RGGGS). This roughly one and a half mile segment of US 53, from approximately 2nd Avenue West to Cuyuna Drive in Virginia, Minnesota, is subject to iron ore mining rights held by RGGGS and Cliffs Natural Resources (United Taconite Division, herein referred to as UTAC), the mine's owner and operator, respectively. At its east end, the US 53 easement segment connects with Minnesota Trunk Highway 135 (MN 135), which provides the inter-regional link toward Gilbert and other communities to the east. Under the 1960 easement terms, MnDOT agreed to relocate US 53 upon notice from the mine owner/operator.

On May 5, 2010, UTAC and RGGGS provided notice to MnDOT that the 1960 easement rights would be terminated. Under the original easement terms, MnDOT must vacate the US 53 easement within three years of notification. In response to the notice, MnDOT requested a seven-year timeframe for relocation of US 53. The two parties have signed an agreement to modify the easement vacation date to May 2017.

The current project schedule anticipates construction will be complete in the fall of 2017. MnDOT will negotiate with RGGGS and UTAC to extend the easement agreement to a date that coincides with the end of construction. In the unlikely event that negotiations are unsuccessful, traffic would be detoured along MN 37, Co. 7, and US 169. Impacts would be temporary and would be similar to the No Build Alternative while the detour is in place (see a summary of impacts for the No Build Alternative in [Appendix H](#)). MnDOT will continue outreach to the public regarding status of construction plans and detours, as necessary.

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT), as joint lead agencies, are proposing relocating the segment of US 53 within the existing easement agreement area.

The preferred alternative generally follows existing US 53 from the south end of the Midway neighborhood to the MN 135 exit ramp for the start of new four-lane construction. The new alignment then continues on a northeasterly track on the present day Landfill Road before turning to the west to cross over the Rouchleau Pit via a bridge. The pit is approximately 250 feet deep at the crossing location, and the bridge would span approximately 1,100 feet with 180-foot or taller bridge piers within the pit. Upon crossing the pit, the preferred alternative turns to the southwest following an abandoned railroad corridor that runs between the pit and residential neighborhoods before reconnecting to existing US 53 at 2nd Avenue. Approximately two and a half miles of new four-lane roadway would be constructed. The preferred alternative is the environmentally-preferred alternative. A detailed description of the preferred alternative is included in Section 2.3.1 of the Final EIS.

The following are cooperating agencies for this project:

- US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)
- US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA)

The following are participating agencies for this project:

- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
- City of Gilbert
- City of Mountain Iron
- City of Virginia

## ■ City of Eveleth

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the US 53 project describes why the project is needed; the alternatives that were studied; the transportation, social, and environmental impacts associated with the alternatives; the public and agency outreach and coordination that occurred as part of the decision-making process; and the proposed mitigation for any anticipated impacts. The Draft EIS also identified the preferred alternative.

The Draft EIS was published in the *Federal Register* on December 19, 2014, and the 45-day comment period extended from the date of publication to February 2, 2015. In accordance with the provisions of the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21), FHWA and MnDOT are issuing a single document that combines the Final EIS and the Record of Decision (ROD). The intent to combine these documents was provided on the signature page of the Draft EIS. After reviewing the comments received on the Draft EIS, FHWA and MnDOT jointly affirmed the decision to prepare a combined Final EIS/ROD. The Final EIS to meet the state requirements was published in June 2015 without the federal ROD, and an Adequacy Determination was made in September 2015 prior to the federal decision.

## Purpose and Need

The purpose of the US 53 project is to address the termination of the 1960 easement agreement that affects the current highway location in order to continue to provide a transportation facility that will safely maintain adequate roadway capacity and mobility as well as local, regional, and inter-regional connectivity.

The need for undertaking this project is derived from the following elements:

- Respond to the roadway easement terms; address the requirements set forth in agreements between the State of Minnesota and the land owner
- Provide a facility that meets regional and inter-regional system connectivity needs and inter-regional highway corridor performance targets
- Maintain local connectivity to the regional system and maintain efficiency of local connections
- Provide a facility that serves current and future capacity needs while maintaining system mobility and safety

## Alternatives Considered

MnDOT initiated Scoping of alternatives in 2011. A range of project alternatives was developed based on several data sources and stakeholder feedback, including the project Purpose and Need (see Chapter 1: Purpose and Need), previous MnDOT and UTAC design concepts, and consideration of applicable technical data.

The February 2012 Scoping Document/Draft Scoping Decision Document (SDD) and September 2012 Final SDD documents describe the process of developing and evaluating the Scoping alternatives in detail. The evaluation process included consideration of issues such as how well each alternative met the Purpose and Need; potential for social, economic, and/or environmental impacts; relative estimated costs; and potential engineering feasibility issues. Stakeholder input was also an important factor in the evaluation process.

After the SDD was distributed in September 2012, more detailed study of the Draft EIS alternatives and their potential impacts was performed. The initial findings regarding the cost and feasibility of some of the Build Alternatives led MnDOT to 1) reconsider some Scoping alternative alignments that had been dismissed from further consideration during the 2012 Scoping process (i.e., Alternatives W-1 and E-1) and 2) assess whether minor alignment modifications to some alternatives (i.e., Alternative E-2) would make them more feasible/cost-effective. In order to add or amend alternatives to be studied in the Draft

EIS, an Amended Scoping Decision Document had to be prepared (Minnesota Rules, part 4410.2100, subpart 8). The September 2013 Amended Scoping Decision Document (ASDD) and the Alternatives Development Report (Kimley-Horn, 2014) provide details of the Scoping reassessment and the resulting decisions regarding alternatives that would be carried forward for study in the Draft EIS. The amended Scoping process alternatives and the amended Scoping decisions regarding alternatives carried forward for study in the Draft EIS are summarized in Section 2.2.2 of the Draft EIS and included five alternatives:

- No Build Alternative (Existing Easement Agreement Area Closed)
- Existing US 53 Alternative (Existing Easement Agreement Area Remains Open)
- Alternative M-1
- Alternative E-1A
- Alternative E-2

As the Draft EIS analysis was prepared, design details were refined as new information was obtained and decisions were made regarding construction options. These design assumptions and decisions are documented in the Alternatives Development Report (Kimley-Horn, 2014).

Agencies and key stakeholders were engaged during the preparation of the Draft EIS in the development of information for the evaluation of impacts and mitigation.

A detailed description of each alternative evaluated in the Draft EIS can be found in Section 2.3 of the Draft EIS.

Based on the analysis conducted for and presented in the Draft EIS, MnDOT identified Alternative E-2 with the Interchange Option (interchange at US 53/MN 135) as the preferred alternative. It was recommended as the preferred alternative based on its ability to meet the project Purpose and Need and minimize impacts to social, economic, and environmental resources, and on the basis of a number of technical and cost considerations. Two alignment options were considered for Alternative E-2 in the Draft EIS between approximately Mesabi Drive and MN 135: the Straight Option and the Curved Setback Option. Both were carried forward for further refinement.

Each alternative evaluated had unique and challenging issues and a combination of impacts. A summary of why the other alternatives were dismissed is provided below. For a more detailed discussion of the selection of the preferred alternative, see Section 10.3 of the Draft EIS.

- The **No Build Alternative** was evaluated as the “do nothing alternative” because it was required for comparison to other alternatives. It was not identified as the preferred alternative since other Build Alternatives (i.e., M-1, E-1A, and E-2) met all of the identified project needs with less severe social, economic, and environmental impacts.
- The **Existing US 53 Alternative** had substantially greater uncertainty and cost than any of the Build Alternatives; therefore, it was not selected as the preferred alternative.
- **Alternative M-1** had feasibility issues (i.e., constructability of foundations in unstable mine waste fill, frequent delays associated with construction in an active mine) and resulted in severe negative impacts that were not offset by the benefits in minimization; therefore, it was not identified as the preferred alternative.
- The **Alternative E-1A RSS Option** had feasibility issues and resulted in severe schedule and constructability impacts (i.e., it is unlikely to meet the timeline due to dewatering, with substantial risks for additional delays due to weather, mine waste fill, and design requirements to mitigate constructability concerns) that were not offset by the benefits in minimization of environmental impacts; therefore, it was not identified as the preferred alternative.
- The **Alternative E-1A Bridge Option** had feasibility issues and resulted in severe negative schedule impacts (i.e., it would require the greatest construction effort to meet the timeline, with substantial risks for delays due to weather, mine waste fill, and design requirements to mitigate constructability

concerns) that were not offset by the benefits in minimization of environmental impacts; therefore, it was not identified as the preferred alternative.

## Findings and Mitigation

After publication of the Draft EIS, the Straight Option was identified as the selected option based on public and agency comments received during the Draft EIS comment period, refinement of the design, and overall environmental impacts. Other refinements in the design of the preferred alternative since the Draft EIS are described in Section 2.3.1 of the Final EIS.

The Final EIS also included updated information on impacts. In the Draft EIS, impacts were calculated based on the area of evaluation for each alternative. These “areas of evaluation” were defined based on general design assumptions, estimated construction limits, potential additional right-of-way needed for stormwater management and other related transportation functions, and other design factors. In the Final EIS, impacts for the preferred alternative were recalculated based on refined construction limits and included staging areas, a snow storage area, a Mesabi Trail connection, additional property acquisition, and a new noise wall location that were not evaluated in the Draft EIS.

MnDOT has worked to avoid, minimize, and mitigate the potential environmental impacts of the proposed project. This process included efforts to involve the public and agency stakeholders in the planning and design of the proposed project. The anticipated impacts of the preferred alternative are summarized in **Table ROD-1** along with the proposed mitigation.

**Table ROD-1. Summary of Preferred Alternative Impacts and Mitigation**

Issue Area	Identified Impact	Mitigation Measures
<b>Right-of-Way</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ 203.1 acres needed for new right-of-way affecting 13 parcels</li> <li>■ Includes five total parcel acquisitions, three of which require commercial relocations</li> <li>■ 6.4 acres of temporary easements required on four parcels</li> <li>■ Mineral rights also need to be compensated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Compensate landowners via Federal Uniform Relocation Act</li> <li>■ Acquire permanent easement or ownership of mineral and surface rights to reduce relocation risk</li> <li>■ If a contractor chooses to pursue temporary easements for staging areas not identified in the Final EIS, standard erosion control and site management BMPs will apply to these areas</li> </ul>
<b>Recreational Lands</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Mesabi Trail and snowmobile trail will be realigned, creating new crossing points</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ To maintain trail connection between Gilbert and Virginia, MnDOT will provide a trail permit on east side of alignment and construct the new connection between Landfill Road and the trail segment within the OHVRA</li> <li>■ Snowmobile use will be allowed on bridge; MnDOT coordinating with agencies on Eveleth trail connection to be constructed by others</li> </ul>
<b>Section 4(f)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ 5.7 acres of the west edge of the OHVRA are required</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ OHVRA impact minimized to extent possible</li> </ul>
<b>Visual and Aesthetic Impacts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Visual changes with a new corridor and potential noise walls</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Visual quality guidelines produced by the Visual Quality Review Committee will be used during the final design process</li> </ul>

Issue Area	Identified Impact	Mitigation Measures
Utilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Utilities are not impacted by MnDOT; however, coordination is required with MnDOT regarding removal and relocation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MnDOT will coordinate with utility owners to accommodate some utilities within the new alignment and coordinate alternate utility routes for others</li> </ul>
Water Supply	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Potential for runoff and sedimentation to the Rouchleau Pit due to construction and spills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stormwater conveyance/treatment and spill containment provisions</li> <li>Turbidity controls during construction</li> <li>Specifications for the source and nature of any fill material used; prohibiting the use of taconite tailings as fill within the Rouchleau Pit</li> </ul>
Waterbody Modification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fill within the pit for pier construction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Standard erosion control/construction best management practices (BMPs)</li> </ul>
Wetlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>15.49 acres of wetland will be impacts by cut or fill, 9.96 acres of which are regulated and require mitigation</li> <li>0.75 acres of wetland will have temporary impacts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9.96 acres of replacement wetland credit to be provided via withdrawal of banked credits per state and federal regulations</li> <li>Temporary impacts will be restored onsite</li> </ul>
Surface Water/Water Quantity and Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Potential for runoff to impact water supply and downstream impaired water</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implementation of stormwater BMPs within project area</li> </ul>
Geology and Soils/Soil Erosion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Construction erosion potential</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implementation of erosion control BMPs within project area</li> </ul>
Noise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Two areas exceed noise standards and meet reasonable and feasible criteria for noise walls</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A noise wall was preliminarily cost effective at Area C (2nd Avenue)</li> <li>A noise wall was preliminarily cost effective at Area F (Midway)</li> <li>Voting by benefitted receivers has eliminated wall construction at Area C (2nd Avenue)</li> <li>Voting by benefitted receivers has eliminated wall construction at Area F (Midway)</li> </ul>
Vegetation and Cover Types	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>39 acres of wooded land removed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BMPs for control of weeds and invasive species will be followed near sensitive areas</li> <li>Revegetation and stabilization of disturbed areas will occur</li> </ul>
Fish and Wildlife	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Potential for peregrine falcon nests on existing pit walls near bridge construction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If peregrine falcons are observed during construction, the MnDOT biologist will be contacted for coordination</li> </ul>
Threatened and Endangered Species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Northern long-eared bat presence confirmed during summer roosting; hibernacula identified outside corridor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tree removal to be conducted in winter months (October 1 to April 1)</li> </ul>

Issue Area	Identified Impact	Mitigation Measures
<b>Hazardous Materials and Contaminated Properties</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Known contamination within or near the corridor</li> <li>■ Some taconite may contain elongated mineral particles (EMP), which has been linked to mesothelioma</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ MnDOT will prepare a Response Action Plan (RAP) prior to any right-of-way acquisition or construction to address contaminants if encountered</li> <li>■ Standard BMPs for handling taconite-containing materials and spills will be followed</li> </ul>
<b>Excess Materials</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Proper disposal or reuse of the existing roadway pavement and the top few feet of roadbed from the terminated easement agreement will be required</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ If disposal is required for waste materials resulting from demolition, this waste will be disposed of in a MPCA permitted demolition landfill</li> <li>■ Specifications for the source and nature of any fill material used; prohibiting the use of taconite tailings as fill within the Rouchleau Pit</li> </ul>
<b>Geotechnical and Earthborne Vibrations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Bridge piers may be susceptible to vibrations and flyrock from future, nearby mine blasting</li> <li>■ Known shale layer in future isthmus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Additional geotechnical investigation and design details will inform BMPs needed to protect road infrastructure</li> <li>■ MnDOT will purchase an area of permanent easement around the bridge that accounts for seismic activity and is large enough to protect the integrity of the structure and roadbed</li> <li>■ Future mining adjacent to right-of-way will require a mitigation plan to be developed by the mine operator for MnDOT approval</li> </ul>



Issue Area	Identified Impact	Mitigation Measures
<b>Construction Related Impacts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Business impacts during highway construction</li> <li>■ Utility removal from corridor by summer of 2016; may require temporary service until bridge and road complete in fall 2017</li> <li>■ Any equipment, materials, or personnel coming into contact with the Rouchleau Pit water due to dewatering or construction may transfer aquatic invasive species (AIS) into the Rouchleau Pit</li> <li>■ Noise due to construction activities</li> <li>■ Increased dust and airborne particles during construction</li> <li>■ Excess material produced during construction</li> <li>■ Temporary earthborne vibrations</li> <li>■ Potential erosion and runoff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Manage traffic control to minimize business impacts during construction</li> <li>■ Provide early notice to utility operators and facilitate coordination</li> <li>■ Additional BMPs to prevent any potential transfers of AIS into the water (e.g., having any equipment or material used for dewatering or construction exposed to dry conditions for at least five days before coming into contact with the waterbody)</li> <li>■ Standard MnDOT construction noise practices</li> <li>■ Standard dust control BMPs such as watering will be implemented</li> <li>■ Handling of regulated materials/wastes per management plan, Response Action Plan, demolition plan, and MnDOT Guidance documents</li> <li>■ Disposal of excess material per approved disposal plan</li> <li>■ Vibration monitoring will be used; blasting, when needed, will be scheduled for minimal disruption</li> <li>■ NPDES stormwater permit for construction activity, including BMPs, temporary construction measures, and erosion control plan will be acquired and complied with throughout construction</li> <li>■ Revegetation and stabilization of disturbed areas</li> </ul>

## Section 4(f) Resources

For the Section 4(f) impact to the Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Area (OHVRA), FHWA sent notice of its intent to make a de minimis determination regarding this project to the DNR in a letter dated January 28, 2014. The DNR concurred with the proposed de minimis determination in a letter dated February 5, 2014, based on proposed construction limits. Three comments were received on FHWA's intent to make a de minimis determination during the public comment period on the Draft EIS; all agreed with FHWA's intent. Therefore, based on the information provided, FHWA finds the impact to the OHVRA is a de minimis impact.

## Monitoring and Enforcement

FHWA and MnDOT are ultimately responsible for monitoring and enforcing mitigation measures. MnDOT and the contractor are responsible for compliance assurance of all related commitments and regulatory permit conditions made or obtained for the US 53 project. MnDOT will use a "green sheet" tracking

system to document and manage all environmental and design commitments made for the US 53 project through the EIS and permit review process (see [Appendix E](#) of the Final EIS). Draft green sheets are included in the Final EIS and will be updated throughout project construction.

## Conclusion

The environmental record for this decision includes the following documents:

- US Highway 53 Virginia to Eveleth Draft Environmental Impact Statement (December 2014)
- US Highway 53 Virginia to Eveleth Final Environmental Impact Statement (June 2015 publication under state rules)
- US Highway 53 Virginia to Eveleth Adequacy Determination (September 2015)
- US Highway 53 Virginia to Eveleth Final Environmental Impact Statement (September 2015)
- All technical reports and supporting documentation incorporated by reference into the Draft EIS and Final EIS

These documents, incorporated here by reference, constitute the statements required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Title 23 of the United States Code on:

- The environmental impacts of the project
- The adverse environmental effects that cannot be avoided should the project be implemented
- Alternatives to the proposed project
- Irreversible and irretrievable impacts on the environment that may be involved with the project should it be implemented

Having carefully considered the environmental record noted above, the mitigation measures as required herein, the written and oral comments offered by other agencies and the public on this record, and the written responses to comments, FHWA has determined that the preferred alternative is also the environmentally preferred alternative. The preferred alternative represents the best option for the US 53 project. FHWA finds that all practicable measures to minimize environmental harm have been incorporated into the design of the preferred alternative. FHWA will ensure that the commitments outlined herein will be implemented as part of final design, construction contract, and post-construction monitoring. FHWA also determines that this decision is in the best overall public interest.

US 53  
From 2nd Avenue West in Virginia  
To Bourgin Road  
St. Louis County, Minnesota

Minnesota State Project Number SP 6918-80, SP 6918-84, and SP 6918-86

## FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

Submitted Pursuant to 42 USC 4332 (2)(c), 49 USC 303,  
and Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 116D

Submitted by:

US Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration (Lead Federal Agency)  
and Minnesota Department of Transportation

COOPERATING AGENCIES  
US Army Corps of Engineers  
US Environmental Protection Agency

REVIEWED AND RECOMMENDED:

9-10-15  
Date

Duane R Hill  
Duane R. Hill, PE  
Transportation District Engineer

APPROVED:

9-10-15  
Date

Lynn Clarkowski  
Lynn Clarkowski, PE  
MnDOT Chief Environmental Officer

9/10/15  
Date

Arlene Kocher  
Arlene Kocher  
Division Administrator  
Federal Highway Administration

The following persons may be contacted for more information regarding this document:

Phil Forst, Environmental Specialist  
Federal Highway Administration  
380 Jackson Street, Suite 500  
St. Paul, MN 55101  
(651) 291-6110  
[Phil.Forst@dot.gov](mailto:Phil.Forst@dot.gov)

Pat Huston, Project Manager  
MnDOT District 1  
1123 Mesaba Avenue  
Duluth, MN 55811  
(218) 725-2707  
[Patrick.Huston@state.mn.us](mailto:Patrick.Huston@state.mn.us)

Comments concerning this Final EIS should be addressed to Pat Huston (address above). Project information can also be found on the project website:

<http://www.dot.state.mn.us/d1/projects/hwy53relocation/>.

# Abstract

The US Highway 53 Virginia to Eveleth Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Draft EIS) published in December 2014 described the transportation and environmental impacts associated with the termination of easement rights for a one and a half mile segment of the US 53 corridor where it crosses the United Taconite open-pit mine between Virginia and Eveleth, Minnesota. On May 5, 2010, United Taconite (UTAC) and RGGS provided notice to the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) that the 1960 easement rights would be terminated. Under the original easement terms, MnDOT must vacate the US 53 easement within three years of notification. In response to the notice, MnDOT requested a seven-year timeframe for relocation of US 53. The two parties have signed an agreement to modify the easement vacation date to May 2017.

The project is located within the Mesabi Range of the “Iron Range” of northeastern Minnesota and is set in the middle of the Quad Cities area, which includes the cities of Eveleth, Gilbert, Mountain Iron, and Virginia. This segment of US 53 is an important local and interregional transportation connection. The land use characteristics within the project area consist of large mining operations, forested land, wetlands, open space, residential areas, and commercial developments.

Five potential alignments were evaluated in the Draft EIS: No Build Alternative, Existing US 53 Alternative, Alternative M-1, Alternative E-1A, and Alternative E-2. All potentially significant environmental, social, economic, and transportation benefits and impacts of the proposed alternatives were evaluated in the Draft EIS, and documentation regarding Section 4(f) recreational resource impacts was also included.

The Draft EIS identified Alternative E-2 with the Interchange Option as the preferred alternative, carrying forward both the Straight Option and the Curved Setback Option for further refinement. The Straight Option has since been identified as the selected option based on public and agency comment received during the Draft EIS comment period, refinement of the design, and overall environmental impacts.

This Final EIS describes the transportation and environmental impacts of the preferred alternative: Alternative E-2 (with the Interchange Option and Straight Option). This Final EIS is presented in a condensed format. This means that each chapter summarizes the changes that have occurred since the publication of the Draft EIS related to the topics covered in that chapter, including design refinements, updated policies/regulations, and updated coordination; describes the impacts of the preferred alternative; and discusses any mitigation that is required. This Final EIS also provides responses to comments received on the Draft EIS.



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# List of Acronyms

AADT	Annual Average Daily Traffic
APE	Area of Potential Effect
ASDD	Amended Scoping Decision Document
ATV	all-terrain vehicle
BMPs	Best Management Practices
BSA	Bank Service Area
CEQ	Council on Environmental Quality
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
CMGC	Construction Manager/General Contractor
CWA	Clean Water Act
dB	Decibels
dBA	A-weighted decibels
DNR	Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
Draft EIS	Draft Environmental Impact Statement
DOT	Department of Transportation
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
ESA	Environmental Site Assessment
Final EIS	Final Environmental Impact Statement
FHWA	Federal Highway Administration
IRC	Inter-regional Corridor
IRRRB	Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation Board
LAWCON	Land and Water Conservation Fund Act
LGU	Local Governmental Unit
LOS	Level of Service
LUST	leaking underground storage tank
MN	Minnesota
MnDOT	Minnesota Department of Transportation
MnDOT CRU	Minnesota Department of Transportation Cultural Resources Unit
MnDOT OES	Minnesota Department of Transportation Office of Environmental Stewardship
MPCA	Minnesota Pollution Control Agency
mph	miles per hour
N/A	Not Applicable
NAAQS	National Ambient Air Quality Standards
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NPDES	National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System
NRHP	National Register of Historic Places

NURP	National Urban Runoff Program
OHVRA	Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation Area
RAP	Response Action Plan
RGGS	RGGS Land and Minerals Co.
ROD	Record of Decision
RSS	reinforced soil slope
SDD	Scoping Decision Document
SHPO	State Historic Preservation Office
SLLCRRRA	St. Louis and Lake Counties Regional Railroad Authority
SWPPP	Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan
UAM	Underground abandoned mine
USACE	US Army Corps of Engineers
USC	United States Code
USEPA	US Environmental Protection Agency
USFWS	United States Fish & Wildlife Service
USGS	United States Geological Survey
UTAC	United Taconite
VIC	Voluntary Investigation and Cleanup
vpd	vehicles per day
VPU	Virginia Department of Public Utilities
WCA	Wetland Conservation Act